



State Representative  
**Kirk Pearson**  
**39th District**

# 2006 Legislative Report

April 2006

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

The 2006 legislative session adjourned March 9, following a very busy and intense 59 days of debate and consideration of legislation affecting Washington's citizens. This year, we accomplished some good things and left some things on the table for next year.

We approved a supplemental operating budget that had some great advancement in education staff pay, home care workers, senior programs, career and technical centers and we moved in the right direction on sex offender sentencing and monitoring. We made some excellent progress to crack down on methamphetamine production and distribution.

Those were a few of the good things we accomplished, but we missed the mark in fiscal management. Even with a \$1.6 billion surplus, budget writers failed to fully pay down our state's unfunded pension liability which, if paid this year, would save taxpayers \$688 million and head off a potential lawsuit against the state. And while we took a positive step on medical malpractice reform, adding more patient safety measures. As the law is written it will not necessarily reduce lawsuits, insurance rates for doctors or patients, or ensure greater access to care.

As always, I am interested in your thoughts and comments. I serve year-round as your representative and hope you will feel free to contact me any time with issues that concern our district. Thank you for allowing me the honor of representing you. Sincerely,

Kirk Pearson  
State Representative



## Safe Neighborhoods – getting tough on sex offenders

This year proved to be one of the liveliest debates on sex offender laws and punishment in the last decade. At the beginning of the session, I co-sponsored **House Bill 2476** which, if passed, would have made Washington's child protection laws the strictest in the nation. While the bill failed to receive a floor vote, it was the start of a long-overdue debate on stricter sentencing for child sex predators and making sure the punishment fits the crime.



The proposal I supported called for solutions that punish every perpetrator whether known or unknown to the victim. It was made clear in heart-wrenching testimony in Olympia, that the majority of sex predators "groom" their victims and develop a trusting relationship for the sole purpose of sexually abusing their victim. These sex predators are all too often people we trust with our children – teachers, clergy, coaches and counselors – making the crime far more devastating to the victim.

While victims' groups and advocates asked the Legislature to pass HB 2476, working with the Democrat majority we crafted a compromise in House Bill 3277. This bill wasn't everything either side of the aisle would deem perfect, but it made some significant improvements to current laws for sentencing, monitoring and curbing some of the Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternative (SSOSA) abuses that were testified to in public hearings.

The following are some of the positive steps HB 3277 takes to protect victims and our neighborhoods:

- A sentence of 30 years to life for rape of a child under the age of 12.
- A 25-year sentence for rape of a child age 13-15.
- GPS monitoring of sex offenders.

*(continued on pg. 2)*

## COMMITTEES:

Criminal Justice and Corrections (ranking Republican)  
Select Committee on Hood Canal (ranking Republican)  
Appropriations

## Representative **KIRK PEARSON • 39th District**

- Adds a felony strike for sex offenders who fail to register.
- Defines “groomers” such as teachers, coaches, counselors, clergy, doctors, etc. who molest a child and makes more offenders ineligible for SSOSA.

We have a few more vital steps to take on this issue, but we passed several pieces of legislation that make great progress in neighborhood safety. Thank you to all who called in expressing the need for stricter sex offender laws. Your calls and letters did make a difference.

### Community protection zones saved

In the wake of the bills to protect our neighborhoods from sex offenders, I worked hard to pass **Senate Bill 6325** to allow for cities to establish residence restrictions for sex offenders and give local governments the ability to enact their own related ordinances as developed through the Association of Washington Cities.

This is a victory for local officials and residents of our district. Local communities should have a say in public safety measures that affect real families.



(l to r): Jim Hines, Founder of Preserve Childhood Innocence; Mark Lunsford, father of Jessica Lunsford; Rep. Jan Shabro, R-Lake Tapps; and Rep. Kirk Pearson, R-Monroe; testify before the House Criminal Justice & Corrections Committee in support of House Bill 2476 titled, *Jessica's Law Plus*.

### Tackling the meth epidemic

Methamphetamine or “meth” is an epidemic in our state, especially in rural areas such as our 39th District. In fact, of the more than 1,300 meth labs reported by the Department of Ecology in the last year, 199 were found in King County, 101 were located in Snohomish County, 31 were found in Skagit County and 25 were discovered in Whatcom County.



While the state reported a slight drop in meth labs discovered from the previous year, even one meth lab in our community is one too many.

Not only does methamphetamine ruin lives and families, it's extremely dangerous to manufacture and clean up. It's also closely linked to property and violent crime; making meth lethal to the user and innocent victims in our communities.

As part of the attorney general's 17-member task force called “Operation: Allied Against Meth” and as the ranking Republican member of the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee, finding solutions to this epidemic has always been a top priority. We made some progress this year including:

- **SB 6239, HB 2567:** SB 6239 is a comprehensive measure against meth which provides additional treatment in beds in state prisons, better protection for vulnerable adults, expanded use of drug courts, and adjustments to state and local meth control. HB 2567 prohibits the purchase or possession of concentrated iodine (in its elemental form), iodine matrix, or more than two pounds of methylsulfonylmethane (MSM), each of which is a precursor substance used to manufacture meth.

If we are serious about tackling methamphetamine and every element associated with it, we need to work together on solutions. We can win the war against methamphetamine here in the 39th District and statewide.

### Relief for area towns included in capital construction budget

The final version of the supplemental 2005-07 capital construction budget passed by the Legislature this year includes \$150,000 to help the flood-prone community of Hamilton move to higher ground. These funds will be combined with federal Housing and Urban Development matching dollars of \$200,000.

The project will also include moving 400 residential housing units. The town of Hamilton will finally get some

# 2006 Legislative Report

needed relief after wrangling with confusing regulations and financial needs.

We use the supplemental budget to adjust the capital budget adopted last year to respond to emergencies and unanticipated needs – and Hamilton’s situation certainly qualifies as an emergency.

The following is a list of long-awaited projects that received funding in the 39th District:

Financial Assistance to Town of Hamilton .....	150,000
Public Works Trust Fund Loan: Arlington Waste Water Treatment plant improvements .....	7,000,000
Public Works Trust Fund Loan: Sedro-Woolley Critical sewer interceptor replacement project .....	7,000,000
Dept. of Ecology.....	
Skagit Comprehensive Irrigation District Plan.....	400,000
<b>Total 39th Legislative District .....</b>	<b>\$14,550,000</b>

## Other good measures this session

### STATE PARK FEE ELIMINATED

In 2003 the State Parks and Recreation Commission instituted a \$5 day-use fee for state parks to make up for cuts in their budget. While not a legislative action, many lawmakers felt this fee prevented families from enjoying our parks. In fact, testimony on this year’s bill to repeal the fee estimated that some 7 million visitors were turned away since the fee was established.

After hearing testimony on the impact of the fee, a bipartisan team in the House and Senate worked together to craft House Bill 2416 to permanently eliminate the day-use charge. The bill passed with strong bipartisan support. Once again, the welcome mat is out for families to enjoy our state’s parks. The repeal of the fees took effect April 9.

### UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORMS

In an effort to reform our state’s unemployment insurance (UI) system, business and labor groups along with legislators went to work patching together a workable solution to the UI system that would curb the rising costs and keep the system fair for employers and hard-working Washington families.

With only 59 days to reach an agreement, negotiators from each caucus were assigned to work on a solution that both labor and business could support. What came out of the long and spirited negotiations was Senate Bill 6885.

This bipartisan bill creates a steady rate structure allowing for less subsidizing between rate classes, and provides stability for rate payers and those receiving benefits. It’s a solution supported by every stakeholder and a true bipartisan legislative effort.

### WASL ALTERNATIVE EQUIVALENT TESTS

Several bills dealing with our education system and the current high school testing standard, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), were passed this year. Among them was Senate Bill 6475 which will allow the Superintendent of Public Instruction to set up three alternative equivalent tests for high school graduation. It will also implement remediation for students struggling to pass parts of the WASL to receive their diploma.

### INCREASED BONDING FOR LOW-INCOME HOUSING

House Bill 3070, which passed this year, will increase bonding ability of the Housing Finance Commission from \$3 to \$4.5 billion and creates a special liability fund for the construction of nonprofit housing. These changes should result in more quality housing for Washington families.

## \$1.3 billion budget fails to pay back pension system

For too long, the Legislature has neglected its responsibility of fully funding the state pension system. The state is supposed to pay into the system every year, but in tough years, payments were not made. Even last year, when the majority party increased state spending by more than 12 percent, they also skipped the payment and failed to meet the state’s pension obligations.



The reality is pensions are similar to a home mortgage. If you skip your mortgage payment, it isn’t long until the balance becomes so high and unmanageable, that it’s nearly impossible to catch up. That’s where we find ourselves right now with our state’s pension system. Continued underfunding has created a \$4 billion gap between what’s invested and what the state will have to pay workers covered by state retirement plans.

The Legislature raised spending by a record \$1.3 billion this budget cycle over last budget. There was plenty of money to pay the unfunded pension liability the state has racked up, but budget writers failed to fully pay down the debt. The longer we wait to pay the system back, the worse the financial burden will be to the taxpayers and local governments.



# Representative **KIRK PEARSON** • 39th District

## Group health care plans get go ahead

Republicans and Democrats joined together to support House Bill 2972 which will allow health carriers to offer a health benefit plan to groups of 500 or more individuals in the same industry (i.e. purchasing pools). These plans will also permit contributions from more than one employer. This legislation passed both the House and Senate unanimously.

If we are going to continue with an employer-based health insurance system in our state, we need to address the changing dynamics of our workforce, such as individuals with several part-time or seasonal jobs, the self-employed, and the overall "transient" nature of workers. House Bill 2972 is a good step forward in trying to address these changes.



## Local students serve as pages in Olympia

Caitlyn Echterling, a 15-year-old freshman from Monroe High School, served as a page the week of Jan. 11. She said that working as a page was a fun and exciting challenge and that learning the legislative process from experience rather than from a textbook is something she enjoyed.



Ninth-graders Phoenix Van Wagoner and Lukas Scherer served as pages the week of February 6, 2006. Both students are 15 years old and attend Concrete High School.

Scherer said he heard of the page position from Van Wagoner, who paged for Rep. Pearson last year. Each decided to take part in the page program this year to learn more about the legislative process.

While I am pleased to head to Olympia a few months of each year to address issues facing the 39th District and our state, the majority of my time is spent here in our district. I travel around to communities for personal meetings with constituents, group meetings, community events and other gatherings at your request.

I encourage you to contact me anytime during the year if you have problems with a state agency or you have ideas on how we can make our communities stronger. I will take the time to visit with you and discuss your ideas and concerns. My legislative assistant, Cameron Bailey, staffs our district locations. The contact information is listed at the right.

## I look forward to hearing from you!

### Sedro-Woolley Office

720 Murdock Street,  
Suite 101  
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284  
(360) 856-3588

### Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600  
(360) 786-7816

### Sky Valley Office

51216 North Riverside Rd.  
Index, WA 98565  
(360) 793-0565

**Toll-free  
legislative  
hotline:**

**1-800-562-6000**

**2006  
Legislative  
Report**

PRESORTED  
STANDARD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
Washington State  
Department of Printing

**Kirk Pearson**  
State Representative  
P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600